Frank Oliver phot

WABASH HERITAGE TRAIL Hike a riverfront flooded with history

By Nick Werner

As its name suggests, the Wabash Heritage Trail capitalizes on Tippecanoe County's rich past, encouraging visitors to connect with historical American Indian, French-Canadian and early Anglo-American cultures.

The 13-mile footpath is a mix of rural and urban landscapes, passing through the narrow forested corridors of Burnett's Creek and the Wabash River, and linking the communities of Battle Ground, Lafayette and West Lafayette.

Trailside markers identify and explain historic landmarks, as well as natural features and plant and animal life.

The markers appeal to West Lafayette High School history teacher Mark Pugh. Pugh also said he likes that the trail's flat terrain allows a broad swath of users, not just hard-core hikers, to enjoy it.

"You'll see the whole gamut of the community out there hiking," he said.

The trail begins in the north at Tippecanoe Battlefield Park in Battle Ground, within the shadow of the 85-foot marble obelisk monument to the Battle of Tippecanoe. The south trailhead is at Fort Ouiatenon, and there are several access points in between.

Trailheads on the Wabash Heritage Trail aren't just spots on the map. They're spots in time.

With a little imagination, hikers at the north trailhead can mind-journey back to Nov. 7, 1811. That's when, at that location, Gen. William Henry Harrison defeated American Indians led by Tenskwatawa, aka The Prophet. The battle signaled the end of thousands of years of American Indian sovereignty in the area.

From that start, the trail parallels peaceful Burnett's Creek, named after one of the area's earliest white settlers. Opened in 1979, the 4-mile Burnett's Creek section is the oldest part of the trail.

Because of its distance and point-to-point route, many users hike the trail in sections, choosing an out-and-back course from a trailhead or access point. The trail can also be hiked point-to-point by parking a vehicle at the end of the hike.

At Davis Ferry Park, the trail passes over the Wabash River on a 1912 iron-truss bridge. The bridge offers a bird's-eye perspective of the Wabash as the

broad river bends south toward the horizon. The span replaced a ferry operation founded in 1823.

South of U.S. 52, the trail enters a modern urban landscape and is paved for three miles as it passes through Lafayette and continues to West Lafayette over the John T. Myers pedestrian bridge. This section is the only stretch of the Wabash Heritage Trail where bicycles are allowed.

After West Lafayette, the trail changes back to a natural surface—dirt and sand—leaving city life behind on its way to the final destination roughly four miles away. A paved, quarter-mile extension along South River Road completed the trail in fall 2011, connecting Fort Ouiatenon with a trail extension from 1997.

Built in 1717 by French Canada, Fort Ouiatenon was the first fortified European settlement in what is now Indiana. George Washington ordered it destroyed in 1791.

In 1909, the Daughters of the American Revolution built a replica blockhouse to symbolize old Fort Ouiatenon.

For those who end their hike at Ouiatenon, the French blockhouse signals it's time to say *au revoir* to the days of voyageurs and fur trappers and head back to the 21st century.

For more information on the Wabash Heritage Trail, call the Tippecanoe County Parks Department at (765) 463-2306, or see *tippecanoe.IN.gov/parks*.

To get to Tippecanoe Battlefield Park from Interstate 65, take exit 178 and head south on State Road 43 (North River Road). After a halfmile, turn east (left) onto Burnett's Road. Then turn north (left) onto North 9th Street (C.R. 100 E./South Railroad Street), following it under I-65. About 1.5 miles later, turn left into Tippecanoe Battlefield Park.

Nick Werner is senior writer for Ol.

A hiker passes under Harrison Bridge in West Lafayette on the Wabash Heritage Trail. The 13-mile trail begins at Tippecanoe Battlefield Park in Battle Ground and ends southward at Fort Ouiatenon. Three miles of the trail lies within the city limits of West Lafayette and Lafayette.

